

Hightower Building
15 S. Lafayette St.
Lafayette
Chambers County
Alabama

HABS No. AL-890

HABS
ALA,
9-LAFA,
4-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HIGHTOWER BUILDING

HABS
ALA
9-LAFA,
4-

Location: 15 South Lafayette Street (corner of South Lafayette Street and 1st Avenue Southwest), Lafayette, Chambers County, Alabama

USGS Lafayette Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 16.649535.3641020

Present Owner: Jamie McClendon
McClendon Trucking Company
123 South Lafayette Street
Lafayette, Alabama 36862 (205) 864-9311

Present Occupant: Lanier Insurance, Financial Services and
offices of Alex Walton Jr., CPA and Rea Clark,
District Attorney

Present Use: Office space

Significance: The Hightower Building, built ca. 1885, is one of the older, more prominent buildings facing the Chambers County Courthouse square. The cast iron storefront and architectural details on the front facade were typical of commercial buildings built from the 1850's to the 1880's. For many years, the second floor of the building housed Lafayette's first telephone exchange. Through the years, the building has housed a variety of commercial uses including a dry goods store, a grocery store and a watchmaker's shop. Much of the original structure is intact and many of the details on the front facade have been restored. The interior details on the second floor, such as the bull's eye moulding and beaded wood paneling, are representative of the time. Although the balcony is a replica, and interior walls have been added to the first floor, the building provides an excellent example of late 19th century commercial architecture.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Ca. 1885
2. Architect: Not known
3. Original and subsequent owners: The original

owner was Thomas Hightower. Shortly after the construction began, he died and it is believed the building was passed on to his heir, G.W. Hightower. No other information about the subsequent owners is known. By the 1980's, the building had fallen into the hands of Charles Dean of Camp Hill, Alabama who sold it to the Lafayette Historic Preservation Authority in 1984. Then, the building was bought at an auction on May 10, 1985 by Jamie McClendon, the present owner.

4. Suppliers: The cast iron storefront was manufactured by Cahill Iron Works in Chattanooga, Tennessee.
5. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. Early photographs of the building show a structure similar to the present renovation.
6. Alterations and additions: Three openings in the rear wall of the basement were bricked up early in the building's history. These openings may have been windows or loading doors for the railroad. The wood framing of these openings remains to indicate their original size. Inside some of these wood frames are smaller windows, indicating access to fresh air. However, they are now partially below ground level and are obstructed by the building immediately to the rear of the Hightower Building.

Historic photos show an exterior staircase on the south wall leading to the second floor. The stairway was subsequently removed and an interior stairway was constructed during the recent renovation. The photos also show a canopy extending out over the balcony. Both canopy and balcony were removed but a replica of the balcony, without the canopy, was added in 1986.

B. Historical Context:

The Hightower Building was built by Thomas W. Hightower in the 1880's. Thomas Hightower died in February 1885 as the building neared completion. It is not known if the building was built with a specific use in mind, although as early as 1891, the first Lafayette telephone exchange occupied part of the second floor. This exchange remained in operation at least until the 1930's. A portion of the building was used for a few years as a railroad terminal by the Lafayette

Railroad. This was a short line built about 1900 as an alternative to the Central of Georgia Railroad. By 1909, the Central had bought the line and removed the tracks.

From the 1890's until the 1960's, the building housed a variety of uses. Originally, the first floor was used as a dry goods store and a jewelry store. Through the years, the first floor has also been used as a grocery store and a watchmaker's shop. An insurance agency and the law offices of Bob Wallace, Sr. occupied the upper floor along with the Lafayette telephone exchange. The upstairs was also used as a boarding house for a while early in the 20th century and for a brief time also served as a temporary school when the roof of the local school collapsed. The building was vacant from the 1960's until 1985. At that time it was purchased by McClendon Trucking Company, a Lafayette firm involved in several local historic building renovations. Refurbishment of the first floor was completed in June of 1986 with the second floor scheduled to be renovated in the future. An insurance agency, an accounting firm, and the District Attorney's office occupy the first floor.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This two story brick structure is typical of mid-19th century commercial buildings with its cast iron front and bold bracketed cornice.
2. Condition of the fabric: The exterior brick masonry was cleaned and the joints re-mortared during the 1986 renovation. First floor windows and sills were replaced and replicas of the original wrought iron balcony and columns were constructed. The original structural wood columns are still visible on the interior. The beaded, wood ceiling and the 35-foot skylight have been preserved. The heart pine wainscoting, bull's eye molding, fireplaces and skylights are still intact on the second floor which is scheduled for renovation.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The Hightower Building is 99'-11" long and 37'-7" wide with a second floor

balcony that projects 10'-1 1/2" from the building front. The unfinished basement runs the full length of the structure. The three part front facade consists of a 9 1/2' wide central tower flanked by two 14' wide bays.

2. Foundations, structural system, framing: The exterior walls are 16" brick load-bearing. The seven intermediate masonry piers within the basement are 2' square and are set 12' on center along the entire length of the building. Eight concrete block supports were later added around the perimeter of the basement. Wood beams, supporting the second floor, are 6x12's and floor joists are 2x13's set 16" on center with a 17' free span to the wall.

On the first floor, mid-span supports are T-shaped, beveled edge wooden columns. Major partition walls are wood stud throughout the building.

3. Side and rear elevations:

- a. Doorways and doors: The basement door opening on the south side is topped by a brick segmental arch. Five steps lead from the sidewalk level to the basement with the 6'-5" door opening occurring at the third step.

The first floor doorway on the south side is topped by a circular white canvas awning and is flanked by 6' wide brick planters. The five approach steps are brick with a wrought iron railing identical to the second floor balcony railing. The double wood doors are set in a 6'-5 3/4" opening and are topped with a transom and brick segmental arch. The hardware and kickplates are brass.

The original second floor door opening on the south side has been covered with sheet metal and the original exterior steps have been removed.

- b. Windows: The two small windows flanking the basement door and the three first floor windows on the south side are still intact. All have wood frames and are topped by brick segmental arches. The first floor windows are 12 light, double-hung with 6 light

transoms.

Second floor windows on the south side have been covered with wooden louvers painted white. The original wood frames are still partly intact, however, behind the louvers. They were double-hung with multiple lights.

The second floor windows on the west side have also been covered, but this time with sheet metal. The partially intact wood frames behind are also double-hung but with no mullions.

The north side of the building has no windows.

4. Front elevation:

- a. First floor: The original cast iron front was manufactured at Cahill Iron Works in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The storefront consists of six bays with the second and fifth bays recessed. The two sets of double wood doors are recessed approximately three feet. The doors have beveled glass panels, brass hardware and kickplates, and are flanked by 3'-6"x7'-6" fixed glass panels with transoms above. The storefront is original.
- b. Second floor: Windows are wood frame, double-hung with four lights. The wooden door located in the center has six glass lights and a transom above. All are topped by decorative metal hoods. Above each window are 9" x 2'-5" vent openings covered with decorative iron grills.
- c. Cornice: The projecting cornice is metal with scroll brackets and scroll-like dentils and modillions. It is broken in the center by a brick arch encircling the building's logo. The cornice is topped by a 1'-10" decorative metal coping and central pediment.
- d. Balcony: The balcony is supported by four iron columns and adorned with a replica of the original cast iron railing with its distinctive geometric design. The balcony has a wood ceiling underneath and metal decking on top. Connections for the canopy

of the original balcony can still be seen on the side pilasters.

- e. Colors: All woodwork is painted pale yellow, iron work is black and the metal window/door hoods and cornice are white.
5. Roof: The roof is w-od-framed and decked with brick parapet walls on two sides that step down to the west. It is built-up roofing with gravel. There are five skylights on the north side of the building (four are over the second floor rooms and one passes through both floors). A sixth skylight is centered over the second floor hallway.

C. DESCRIPTION OF INTERIOR:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: The basement, which runs the full length of the building, is open except for the foundation structure. The structure consists of load-bearing walls, seven original brick piers (which run along the center of the building) and concrete block columns, which have been added to provide additional structural support. The entrance is located on the south side and two windows flanking the door admit fresh air and light. The three window openings on the west wall were bricked up probably at the time of construction on the adjacent lot.
- b. First floor: The first floor was originally designed as an open floor plan but has recently been divided into offices. The original storefront, with entrances in the second and fifth bays, remains intact. The original beaded wood ceilings and T-shaped wooden columns have been preserved. All interior walls have been added forming a central hallway and creating a plan similar to the original layout of the second floor. The crown moldings, chair rail, baseboard, doors and transoms all came from the Old Lafayette Hotel. These details, although not exactly the same, are of similar architectural style and complement the existing original details. A new side door has been added to the south elevation. Much

of the original tongue-and-groove flooring is now covered with carpet or tile.

- c. Second floor: There are offices to the north and south of a central corridor which bisects the building. An entrance hall leading from the original second floor doorway joins the corridor. The offices range in size from 11'-9"x14'-3" to 17'-9"x14'-3". Most of the offices have a small corner closet located next to the office's corridor entrance. The offices on the south and east sides are all lighted by exterior windows. Offices on the north without windows receive natural light from overhead skylights. The wood flooring has been cut to allow wiring for additional lights in the first floor ceiling and some of the wood flooring has suffered from water damage. Most of the original details and finishes are intact but have not yet been restored.
2. Stairways: The second floor was originally served by an exterior staircase (which can be seen in the early photos). That staircase was probably removed when the building was abandoned in the 1960's. The interior stair, which now serves the upstairs floor, was added in 1986 when the building was renovated.

The basement level is below grade and is accessed by concrete steps from the sidewalk. The first floor is above street level and is accessed by brick steps on the south side of the building.

3. Flooring: The original flooring was 4" tongue-in-groove, heart pine wood flooring. All of the wood flooring on the first floor, except for one room in the rear, has been covered with tile or carpet. Much of the existing flooring on the second floor is original but has suffered extensive water damage. Also, some of the wood flooring on the second floor has been cut to allow additional lighting to be placed in the first floor ceiling.

The dirt floor of the basement remains unfinished.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The original walls are plaster on wood lath, usually painted or papered. On the first floor, partition walls are painted gypsum board, except below the chair rail in the corridor is papered. All of the room ceilings on

the first floor were lowered through the use of suspended acoustic tile. The hallway ceiling, however, retains the original height and the original beaded wood ceiling. The pattern which appears on the ceiling is the same pattern that appears on the second floor wainscoting.

The second floor walls are plastered above the chair rail and are covered with a wood wainscoting below. This wood paneling consists of alternate bands of beaded and flat surfaces. The ceilings are also plastered and were originally painted or papered. A graphic wall painting of a bell logo identifies the telephone exchange and faces the second floor exterior door.

Basement walls are exposed brick structure.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: On the second floor, hallway doors are 3'-2"x 7'-2" with transoms above. Interior office doors and closet doors are typical but have no transoms. The trim on all interior doors on the second floor are 6". There is a cased opening, connecting two of the rear offices, which is wider but has the same door trim around it. All of the door frames on the second floor have a bull's eye corner detail.

The first floor doors are not original. They were salvaged from the Lafayette Hotel along with the chair rails, baseboards, and crown molding.

- b. Windows: All interior windows on the second floor have the same trim as the door frames. The window trim on the first floor is wider and does not carry the bull's eye motif. The second floor windows have been boarded up and, except for the east facade, little of the original windows themselves remain.

- 6. Decorative features and trim: There are thirteen original coal burning fireplaces. Twelve are located upstairs, one in each office, and all but one still have their original mantels. The other fireplace is located on the first floor and was originally used in addition to three wood-burning stoves to supply heat.

The bull's eye detail appears at the corner of all window and door frames on the second floor. The wood detail consists of two carved, concentric rings with a protruding point in the center.

The wainscoting consists of a 9" baseboard, wood paneling and a chair rail. The wood paneling is the same as the original beaded ceiling on the first floor and consist of alternating bands of beaded and flat surfaces. The bands are 4" wide. This detail appears in all the rooms and the hallway of the second floor.

The cast iron storefront also has interesting details on the interior surface. The bottom of four of the bays is decorated with a rectangular panel pressed into the store front. The bull's eye molding, similar to that found on the second floor, highlights the corners of each rectangular panel. These panels also have the same beaded pattern, found on the second floor wainscoting and first floor ceiling, but it runs diagonally rather than vertically.

7. Lighting fixtures: The original lighting fixtures have been removed from both floors. The first floor fixtures have been replaced with more contemporary lighting fixtures.
8. Ventilation: The transoms above the doorways on the second floor are part of a natural ventilation system used in the building. Used in combination with open windows, the transoms could be adjusted to different angles allowing a greater flow of air throughout the second floor. Vents on the front and back of the building also allowed fresh air to circulate through the attic space. Since the interior offices on the north side had no windows, it may be assumed that the original skylights in these rooms were operable to allow for additional air circulation.

D. SITE:

1. General setting: The building is on a corner and faces east onto South Lafayette Street and the Chambers County Courthouse. The south side of the building fronts First Avenue Southwest which slopes down to the west. The Hightower Building is flanked by commercial buildings on the north and west sides.

2. Landscaping: On the south side of the building, six Bradford Pears and some low-lying shrubbery have been planted along the sidewalk. Some brick pavers have also been added at the side entrance. An old wooden phone booth is located on the southeast corner.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Old photographs (from McClendon Trucking Company collection):

East facade before renovation.

View from southeast corner with original balcony.

- B. Interviews:

Ruth Crump, Chambers County Historian

- C. Published sources:

Chambers County Deed Books and Probate Records,
Chambers County Courthouse, Lafayette, Alabama.

"A Phoenix Rising". The Valley Times-News. June 11, 1986.

"Hightower Building Reclaimed from Past". The Valley Times-News. June 18, 1986.

The Lafayette Sun. June 18, 1986.

"McClendon Buys Historic Hightower Building". The Valley Times-News. May 13, 1985.

"Old Lafayette Taking on Fresh New Look". The Columbus Ledger and Enquirer. May 22, 1986.

Sanborn Insurance Maps. 1885, 1891, and 1904.

"Trucking Company to Restore Hightower". Ledger-Enquirer East Alabama Today. May 30, 1985.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was completed during the spring quarter of 1988 at Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama. Project supervisors were Professor William Briggs and Kimberly E. Harden, AIA. Students from the Department of Architecture and the Graduate Program in Planning were:

Deborah Adkison
T. Paul Bates
Nancy Burke
Judith E. Collins
Darla S. Davis
David Harris
Karen Hundt
Lee Ann Jackson
Katherine Lynn
Elaine G. Pierce
Mark E. Pierson
Julie Ann Smith
Phillip B. Smith
Michael R. South
Gail M. Tubbs
Sidney P. Ward
Mae B. Washington
David Mingtze Wu

Prepared as a Peterson Prize Competition entry, this documentation was donated to the HABS collection by the above students of Auburn University.

Lifestyles

Hightower Building Reclaimed From Past

By PENNY L. POOL
Staff Writer

Valley Times-News

Some people may have laughed when Jamie McClendon bought the battered Hightower Building. The historic building had been allowed to deteriorate into a leaking shell, and it seemed highly likely the 27-year-old LaFayette City Councilman was going to stub his toe.

Today, the Hightower

Building spruces up the entire block, gleaming with pride at the corner on Highway 431, across from the Courthouse. It's story is truly one of a diamond in the rough. Now, it is regarded as a real jewel.

The Hightower is the fourth building in downtown LaFayette to be renovated to outstanding attractiveness by the McClendon Family. McClendon Trucking Com-

pany renovated the old Singer Auto building for its corporate headquarters. In perspective, renovation is a cheap word for the transformation. The building would look at home in the ritziest area of Atlanta's Peachtree Street.

Since then, Jamie and Al Parker have renovated the old LaFayette Sun building, originally as a private catering and dining facili-

ty. Originally planned for only a brief run before the public, Court Square has become a drawing card to the formerly deserted streets of LaFayette. Consequently, the building, which also housed offices at one time, is being renovated again to double the kitchen area to accommodate the increasing demand.

"We opened to advertise the catering services."



Before



After

Jamie said, "and just never closed. It is nice to have people dining, and enjoying the courtyard."

McClendon's office overlooks the courtyard, which has been the scene for weddings and other special events. During the interview, he received a call concerning the stage for the Auburn University Singers, who opened their new season in LaFayette. The restaurant is open only at night, Thursday through Saturday, but in the future, it will be open more evenings.

The partnership between McClendon and Parker, who owns a grocery store, made up for their lack of experience in the restaurant business. Jamie had the business experience in record keeping and costing (figuring the cost for food and services and pricing food in order to make a profit), and Parker knew about food purchasing. Also, their friends gave them good advice, he said.

The building, which they designed together, would have been done differently if they had realized they were going into the restaurant business, he said. People come to this sleepy little town, from Auburn, Opelika, Columbus, Roanoke, LaGrange — all around, he said, as well as homefolks.

He is not surprised they would drive to LaFayette to dine. "I think LaFayette is very unique, as far as the area goes, with the courthouse and the town square. I think it can be a very nice little town. If you do get a good reputation, no matter where you are, people will come to you. It doesn't matter that we are located in LaFayette, as far as the restaurant is concerned. If the food is good, and you have a nice atmosphere and quality, people will come. I've had people say the food is as good as anywhere they have ever eaten," said the young businessman. The quaintness of the building, emphasized by antiques as decor, attract people who want something different.

But why almost single-handedly try to revive the downtown section?

Jamie says flatly, "People are not coming to be a part of something that doesn't look attractive.

You can't expect them to."

The renovation of the four buildings, he said, "gets the ball rolling." People driving through have stopped and asked him about office space. They notice the buildings and want to rent them. Hydro-Dynamics, which makes sheeting for water beds, has bought the old Avondale Mill Building, he said. The Arizona-based firm will probably begin operation at the end of the summer, employing a number of people. "When one business opens, when you start making a little progress, others follow suit," he said. Court Square has provided 20 full and part-time jobs, he pointed out.

"I think people do not realize the potential of old buildings and how good their foundations are. If you renovate and do things right, it is easy with the right contractor," he said.

It has not been cheap. McClendon purchased the Hightower Building about a year ago for \$40,000 and has spent about \$60,000 on the project. Jamie said he is not losing money, but he is not making money either — or even trying to make money — just trying to do for the town. The tax credits he received for the building renovations have been reused in further renovations. The money he saved on income taxes, he then used on the other buildings.

The renovated Hightower Building and the old LaFayette Hotel will be used for office space. Lanier Insurance Company is ensconced in the front portion of the Hightower Building, which includes a bay window, overlooking the sidewalk. Alexander G. Walton, CPA and Financial Services, share an office and two other offices are ready for occupancy.

The sunny, light-filled building features a skylight, columns, and green-black original ironwork. A loading door, used many years ago to elevate items such as salt pork off a railroad spur

into the cellar where area merchants would pick it up, is again operational.

Jerry Still of the Chambers County Vocational Center, rebuilt the iron work after the original. As an historic building, it had to be renovated to its original state. Special paint remover was used. The bricks were thoroughly cleaned with water, then sprayed with silicone to make the building air tight. The windows and sills were replaced, and 14-foot Bradford Pear trees and shrubs were planted to add grace to the building. The storefront had to be reassembled, since the bay had been removed to add a staircase. McClendon said the joints were cut in the brick and re-mortared, a less expensive process in the long run and makes the building as good as new.

Harmon Contracting is doing the Hightower building and expanding the kitchen on the restaurant. Hudmon Construction did the corporate headquarters.

All construction is to be finished by this Friday,

and McClendon will breathe a sigh of relief, since he has been supervising the construction while serving as secretary/treasurer for McClendon Trucking Company. He is also vice president of H & J Leasing Company, which he and his brother, Hugh, own.

Jamie does not regret the time and money spent. "The building was just sitting there, deteriorating, and something with that much historical value will mean a lot to the town. We might do more to the upstairs later.

"I like LaFayette, and I like the way of life here. I travel a lot. I have the opportunity to leave and enjoy the rest of the country and come back and enjoy LaFayette. That's the reason we kept our corporate headquarters here — the way of life. We like it here.

"LaFayette has finally seen things can be done if the people work together. Sometimes, people take for granted how pretty LaFayette is. There are a lot of good, energetic people here. (Please See Hightower P. A-2)

(Continued From P. A-4)

ple here," said the businessman and entrepreneur.

Leonard Blanton, local historian, said the building has seen many businesses come and go, including lawyer offices upstairs, the old LaFayette telephone exchange around 1905, and grocery and general merchandise stores. He could not pinpoint the building's exact age, but said many people think it was built in 1904.

Blanton remembers when Allen Frazier's grocery was there, and a watchmaker by the name of McConaughy, who had a huge pocket watch as advertisement for his business.

Blanton said at one time, a switch track on the side of the building provided area merchants with service. The LaFayette Railroad Company owned the track, the area's second railroad. LaFayette merchants could not afford Central of Georgia freight rates, so a spur was built from LaFayette to Opelika just for LaFayette merchants in the bed of what is now Highway 431. It ran for 16 years, then, Central of Georgia bought it out and tore up the tracks.

THE LAFAYETTE SUN June 18, 1986



The renovation of the historic Hightower Building in downtown Lafayette is now complete according to the building's owner Jamie McClendon. Tenants who have already moved into the building are Lanier Insurance, Financial Services and Alexander Walton, Jr., CPA. The once open space of the first floor has been divided by walls, creating four large offices. All columns and ceilings are original, as well as the front doors and side entrance. The interior doors and transoms came from the old Lafayette Hotel, and the French doors that lead into Lanier's conference room are original doors from the old hospital. The ceilings are 15' high, and in the restoration process Don Allen of Harmon Contracting uncovered an original skylight which runs 85' through both floors. The Hightower Building was completed in April, 1895.

McClendon Buys Historic Hightower Building

By PENNY L. POOL
Times-News Staff Writer

It was learned at the LaFayette City Council meeting Friday that Jamie McClendon, local businessman and LaFayette City Councilman, had purchased the historic Hightower Building for \$40,025 from the Historic Preservation Board (HPB) at an auction Friday.

The building faces the courthouse and is well over a 100 years old. The board had reroofed and stabilized the building. McClendon plans to restore the outside to its original condition, market it, then restore the inside to the needs and specifications of the buyer.

McClendon said he may take a loss on the building but he wanted to buy it because it was such an old, historic building and it has so much potential.

The council also reviewed odorizer bids for gas lines. Low bid was \$8175 from Reynolds Equipment of Garland, Texas, considerably under the budgeted amount, pointed out City Clerk Pete Gardner. Other bids were \$9700 from Arnold Energy of Birmingham and \$8910 from GPM Equipment of Pelham. Gardner said a maximum of 6-8 weeks will be the delivery date.

Council opened bids for the maintenance of the newly acquired Handy Cemetery. Low bidder was Albert Finley at \$350 a month on an eight-month contract. Other bidders were Danny Teel, \$460 a month and Annie Mae Welch, \$600 a month.

Gardner passed around photos of LaFayette homes badly needing repair and asked that a resolution be passed at the Monday night (May 13) meeting approving application for Governor's discretionary funds to repair or improve the owner-occupied housing. He

Also, Please See LaFayette P. 14

LaFayette

(From P. 1)

said Ellen Austin of East Alabama Planning and Development Commission will be present to answer questions at the public hearing at 8:30 on improving the housing in LaFayette.

Pete said the vacating of the street running through Hill Lumber Company is more complex than it first appeared, according to City Attorney Billy Walton, who is checking into the legalities.

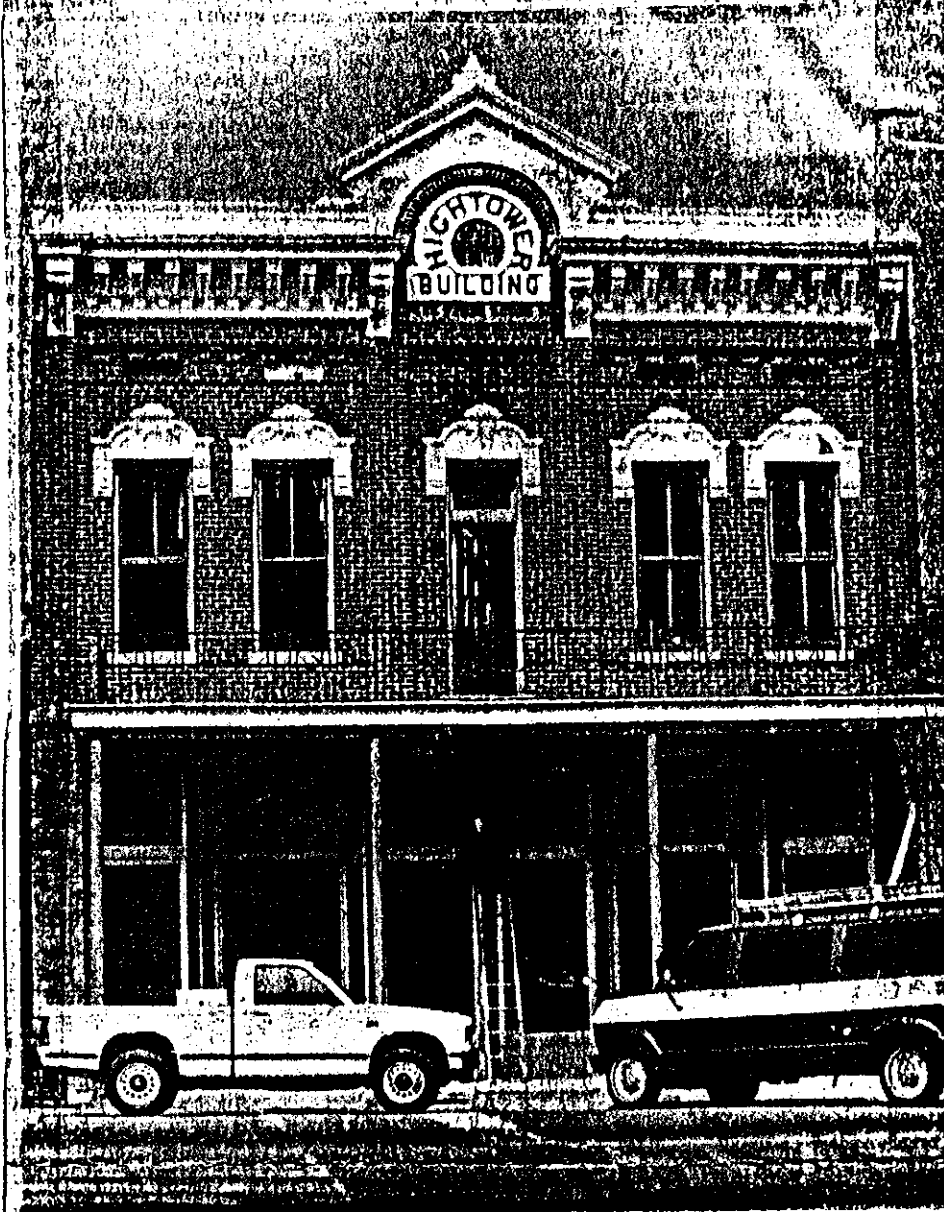
Gardner said the billing machine has cost the city \$2500 in repairs over the last few months and held up the billing for two-three days at the end of April. He plans to ask the council Monday night for authorization to draw up specifica-

tions to let bids for a new machine. Tandy Corporation presented a lease-purchase agreement some time back, he said, which looked good and would be the kind of deal the city needs. A target date to be in operation should be October or November. He said he might have a price at Monday night's meeting.

Gardner said the lift station for the city pump station needs rebuilding, which Sewer Department Head Billy Walters can possibly do but the parts alone will cost \$15-20,000.

Councilman Gerald Knight proposed a hamburger cookout be held for city employees at the city park. The councilman present agreed and Gardner was delegated to make sure the park is in good condition.

'Old' LaFayette Taking On Fresh New Look



Historic Hightower Building on the courthouse square is ready to welcome new tenants. By Faye Waldrop-Schaub

May 22, 1986

Ledger-Enquirer East Alabama TODAY

Hightower Building Part Of City's Restoration Effort

By Virginia Smith
TODAY Correspondent

The Courthouse Historic District in LaFayette is taking on a "new" look that is the "old" look as well — the look of the old now restored to its original appearance.

Much of this restoration is due to the efforts and talents of Jamia McClendon, born and raised in LaFayette and keenly aware of the heritage of his hometown.

The first floor of the Hightower Building, a landmark on the square, is now complete and the tenants are moving in, including Lanier Insurance, Financial Services and offices of Alex Walton Jr., CPA.

Others will be moving in later. All are allowed to choose their own decor such as wallpaper and paint colors. McClendon has installed wainscoting and chair rails in the office.

He has also divided the once-open space of the first floor with walls; the original columns were left intact. The front doors are original, as is the store front. The interior doors and transoms came from the old LaFayette Hotel, as did the French doors.

Don Allen of Harmon Engineering and Testing of Auburn is the contractor, and he says he is learning a lot about restoration in the project.

When first built, the building had a wrought-iron balcony across the second floor. It has long ago vanished, but now a replica, copied from old photographs, has been built. The job was done by students from Chambers County Vocational School in LaFayette.

The ceilings are 15 feet high and in the restoration process, Don Allen uncovered the original skylight, which runs 35 feet through both floors. The beaded wood ceilings in the hallways have been preserved.

"The Hightower was very well built," Allen said, "and we found

no termites. Not surprising, because the wood is heart pine. All of the interior woodwork is also heart pine."

There was only one fireplace downstairs, but there were three wood-burning stoves to provide heat. The one fireplace has been saved with an original mantel.

McClendon said the upstairs restoration is also planned. The second floor once housed the town's first telephone office, Bob Wallace Sr.'s law office and an insurance office. All the rooms have a fireplace and a skylight. Still on the office doors are the words, "Come In" and a color-on-glass logo of Fidelity Life Insurance. The original power box is still on the walls and will be saved — not for use, but for historic interest.

The Hightower once had an outside staircase which was the only entry to the second floor. This has been removed and an inside staircase will be built. All the outside bricks have been remortared, cleaned and sprayed for water treatment.

Old brick from the county jail has been used to build steps to a side entrance, and an original telephone booth is in the corner. All of the area will be landscaped.

The original building had four columns at the front. These have been replaced by exact copies, also with work from the Chambers County Vocational School students.

All of the ironwork will be black and the exterior woodwork painted a cream color.

The old Hightower is back in all its glory. When built, it was praised for its design and appearance. Over the years, the building has served as a grocery store, a hardware store and the headquarters of other businesses, but mostly it has just sat and deteriorated.

That hard time is over, and the Historic District is the better for

Trucking Company To Restore Hightower

By Virginia Smith
TODAY Correspondent

LAFAYETTE — For more than a century the imposing Hightower Building has served as landmark on the Chambers County courthouse square.

The building has stood empty, damaged by time, weather and vacancy. Last year, the LaFayette Historical Preservation Authority, determined to save the building, bought the two-story structure from Charles Dean of Camp Hill. Dean agreed to sell the building after he was unable to locate a suitable tenant.

Now the Hightower Building has a new lease on life. Jamie McClendon of LaFayette, an executive in the McClendon Trucking Company, has bought the building for \$40,000 and will restore and bring back to life its many features.

"I am still seeking information on the men who designed the building and the exact date of construction. I know the first floor was a hardware store in 1910 and upstairs was located the first telephone exchange in LaFayette. The late Bob Wallace Sr. once had his law offices upstairs," McClendon said.

McClendon said the upstairs is something to see. "All the offices have a skylight in the middle of the rooms, all have corner closets, and each door has solid brass doorknobs. Each office had its own coal burning fireplace and these with mantels are intact. The wainscoting and all the woodwork are original," he said.

The Hightower building is brick with cast iron trim over the exterior doors and windows. McClendon will restore the interior and exterior, removing the paint from the bricks and replacing the doors and windows. "It is already watertight because the Authority put on a new roof and spent \$24,000 to stabilize the building," he said.

The Hightower Building is already on the Alabama and National Registry of Historic Buildings, and all the restoration will be authentic.



Staff Photo by Pave Waldrop-Schoob

HIGHTOWER BUILDING

McClendon has two goals—first, to save the building and second, to bring new jobs to the area. He does not see the first floor as a retail operation, however. The second floor will be restored for offices. He will restore the outside shutters and the wrought iron balcony to the second floor.

"Even though the building has been neglected and vacant, it is so well built with such excellent materials. It is structurally sound," McClendon said.

McClendon is no novice in restoration. His father, Glenn McClendon and his sons restored the old Singer Automobile Agency building just off the square.

The Singer and Hightower projects are only two of those now under way to restore all of the court house square.

In the Chambers County probate records are those of G.W. Hightower, dated April 8, 1885. He sold medicine in the Hightower building with an inventory valued at \$4000.